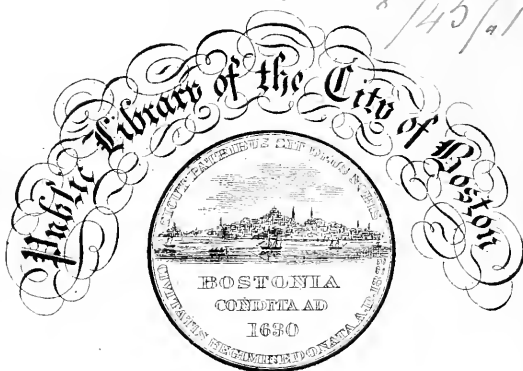


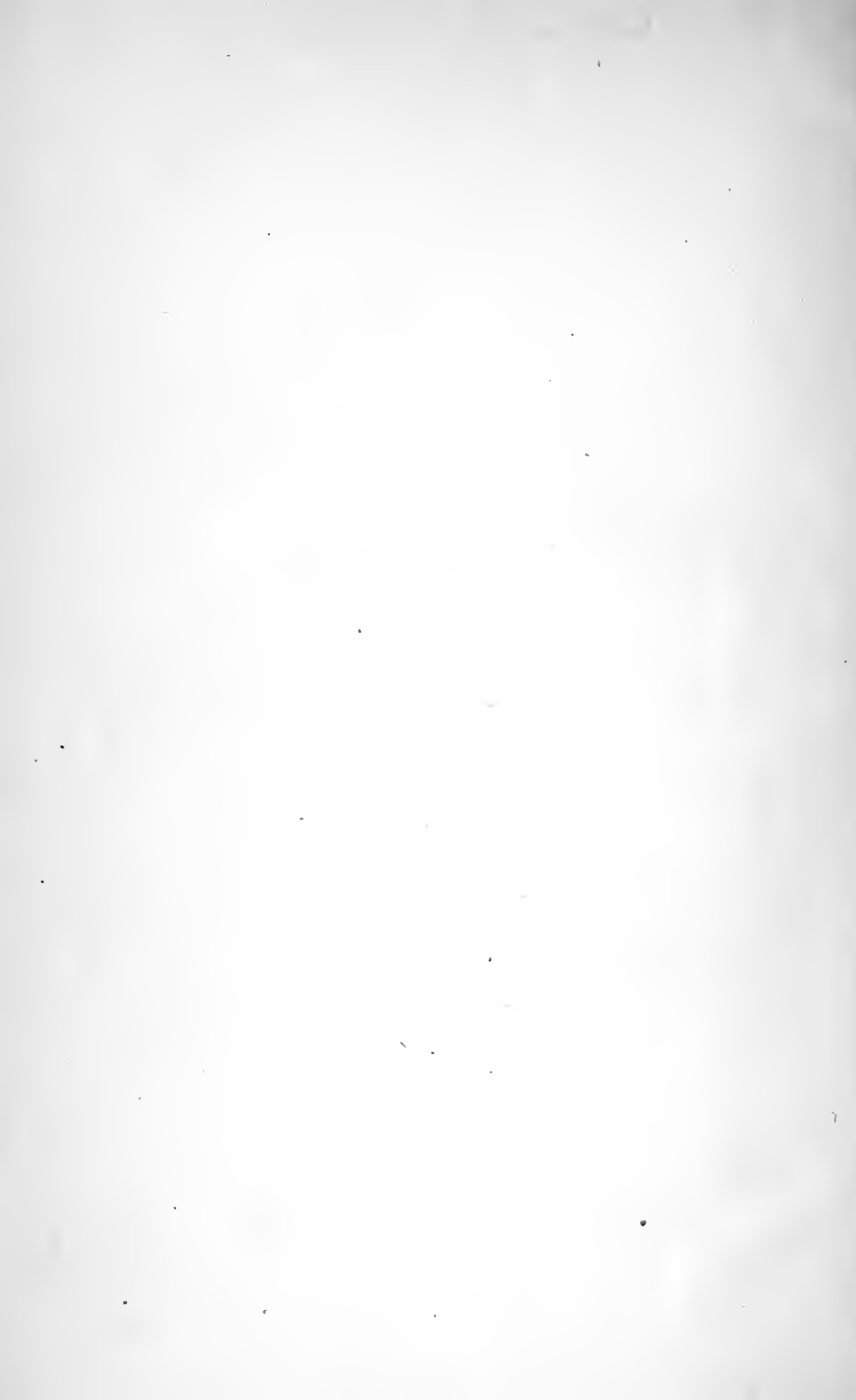
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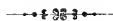
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# **DR. WOODS'S SERMON**

**AT THE**

**INSTALLATION**

**OF THE**

**REV. THOMAS M. SMITH.**

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THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO MINISTERIAL EFFORT.

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A

# SERMON

DELIVERED

AT THE INSTALLATION

OF THE

REV. THOMAS MATHER SMITH

AS PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

CATSKILL, N. Y.

JUNE 15, 1831.

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BY LEONARD WOODS, D. D.

Professor of Christian Theology in the Theological Seminary, Andover.

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# Introduction

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## SERMON.

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1 COR. 3 : 7.

SO THEN NEITHER IS HE THAT PLANTETH ANY THING, NEITHER HE THAT WATERETH; BUT GOD THAT GIVETH THE INCREASE.

IT is very desirable, that we should form just and definite conceptions of the particular agency which we are required to exercise, both in the natural and moral world. And it is certainly no less desirable, that we should form just conceptions of the agency which belongs appropriately to God,—that we should understand what is his province, both in the concerns of the present life, and in the concerns of his spiritual kingdom. It would be a most singular and lamentable mistake, to suppose that the infinite Being, to whom all power belongs, has so resigned the interests of the world into our hands, that henceforth all the agency which is to be exerted, is to be exerted by *us*;—to suppose that the exercise of God's power ended in the act of creation, and that now he has nothing to do. There can be no sentiment more contrary to the representations of the Bible, or to the feelings of the pious heart. What man, acquainted with his own ignorance and weakness, would not be distressed at the thought, that there was no agency higher or wiser or holier than his? Who would dare to act at all, if he supposed the great interests of the world depended ultimately on that small measure of wisdom, power, and goodness, which he possesses? The work assigned to us is indeed highly important; but that which God has reserved to himself is unspeakably more important. *Our* work is only proportionate to the very limited powers which

we possess. But the work which *God* performs, corresponds with his infinite perfections. In relation then to the interests of the universe, we must consider God's agency to be as much more important than ours, as his perfections are more exalted. If we forget this, we forget what the glory of God requires us always to remember ; and what is also of the highest importance to us as a motive to diligence, and a source of comfort. Let us then endeavour to apprehend, in all its extent, the work which we are to perform in the concerns of the church ; so that we may direct the exertion of our powers to the right object, and accomplish the more by acting within our province. Let us also fix our thoughts upon the agency of God, and endeavour to understand it in all its magnitude and importance ; remembering that the divine agency, besides being so exalted and momentous in itself, is the original spring of all the agency which *we* exert, and of all the good which results from it. It is in him we live, and move, and have our being. It is through help derived from him, that we plant and water ; and then it is he that gives the increase.

Now as the agency of God in the concerns of his spiritual kingdom is so inexpressibly important, and as it is made so prominent in the instructions of his word ; why are we so prone to overlook it ? How comes it to pass that we make so high an estimate of the agency of man, and so low an estimate of the agency of God ?

This may be accounted for in part by the fact, that *man's* agency is *visible*, and *God's* agency *invisible*.—When a Christian minister is laboring to make known divine truth and bring sinners to repentance ; we see him ; we hear him. The agent and the agency are both objects of our senses. But *God* is *invisible* ; and so is the agency he exerts. The effects of his agency come under our observation ; but the agency itself lies wholly concealed from our view. When God accomplishes the most conspicuous work, his hand is unseen, and all we can behold is the work accomplished. This circumstance, which weighs much by itself, has an increased influence, by being connected with another, namely, that in the very instances in which the invisible agency of God is specially employed, there is, for

the most part, a *visible human* agency. In such cases, how common it is for us, creatures of sense as we are, to fix our eye chiefly upon the dependent, feeble agency of man, because it is *visible*; while the supreme and almighty agency of God, concerned in the same event, is comparatively unnoticed, because it is *invisible*.

I might mention it as an additional circumstance, which helps to account for the oversight above mentioned, that the *manner* of the divine agency is *so different* from ours. A great difference we could not but expect to find here, considering that the attributes of God are infinitely superior to ours; and that his agency is independent and almighty, while the highest agency which we can exert, is very circumscribed, and wholly dependent. But is it not a general fact, that this very perfection of the divine agency turns off our attention from it? Because God has a direct and perfect access to the minds of men, and influences all their thoughts, dispositions and affections according to his own pleasure, and thus makes it manifest that his ways are not our ways, and that no one can be likened to him; we are therefore prone to disregard his agency altogether. We deny the operation of his power for the very reason which should lead us most devoutly to acknowledge it; namely, because it is infinitely superior to ours;—because it is *divine*.

But there is still another reason for the mistake I have mentioned, and that is, *the pride of the heart*. This naturally inclines us to make too much of our own agency; to attribute the success which may attend our efforts, to ourselves, and to say, *my hand hath done this*. Just so far as we are lifted up with pride and vanity, we shall be disposed to overrate our own influence, and to withhold from God the glory which is due to him, especially for the agency he exerts in the souls of the redeemed. He who would entertain right views on this subject, must mortify all pride and loftiness of heart, and cherish the spirit of humility and self abasement. Such a spirit will prepare us to honor God, as the supreme cause of all good, and to say with our Apostle, “neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth; but God who giveth the increase.”

But my principal object on the present occasion is to show, that *the doctrine of divine influence, as held forth in the text, presents the only adequate encouragement to the servants of Christ, to labor for the conversion of sinners, and the prosperity of the Church.* A careful attention to the subject will make it evident, that there is no other encouragement which will meet the exigencies of the case ; but that this is every way sufficient.

To convert sinners from the error of their ways ; to give success to the gospel and prosperity to the church, is a work of immense magnitude and difficulty, and far transcends the power of man. The heart of every human being is wholly inclined to sin ; deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, yea, enmity against God. This is the case universally. It is so even with those who are farthest removed from the contagion of vicious example, and least practised in the ways of sin.

But in addition to this difficulty, arising from the strength of our natural corruption, there are various other hindrances in the way. The unrenewed not only have hearts which are naturally selfish, and alienated from God ; but they are fortified against the motives to repentance, by the evil customs of the world, and by the influence of invisible and malignant spirits who are bent on their destruction. These difficulties oppose the conversion of those who enjoy the best Christian instruction. But when you look upon men in heathen countries, you find the case still more difficult. For their hearts are shielded against divine truth and hardened in sin, by all the forms of superstition and idolatry ; by despotic, cruel, persecuting governments ; by the power of ignorance, and the power of caste. Satan appears to have availed himself of all the principles of our nature, and even of *conscience*, misguided and perverted by his influence, in order to rivet the chains with which he has bound the souls of men, and to hinder them from casting off the miserable bondage of sin.

Now what can we expect from those who are possessed of such a character, and placed in such circumstances ? Have they any seeds of goodness within them, which may, by human culture, be made to bring forth fruit unto holiness ? Is there any ground of hope, that good will ever, in any instance, spring from their *will*

or *moral agency* in their natural state?—a will totally enslaved to sin?—a moral agency altogether misguided and perverted by corrupt affection? Both the word of God and the history of all past ages teach, that no degree of holiness can ever result from any power or faculty, disposition or effort of men, while unrenewed.

And in regard to so great and difficult a work as the conversion of sinners, what reliance can we place upon *ourselves*, as *ministers of the gospel*? What are *we*, that we should think ourselves sufficient for such an undertaking? Were our qualifications ever so high; had we the knowledge and the energy of Paul, the eloquence of Apollos, the holy sublimity of Isaiah, and the ardor and boldness of Elijah;—could we speak with the tongues of men and of angels; still what could we of ourselves effect? By all our efforts, continued ever so long, we could not penetrate one heart of stone; we could not bring one sinner to repentance; we could not convert a single child. The work lies beyond us. The sinner is not born again of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man. Ministers and Christians might exert all their power for a century, to make known divine truth and induce sinners to obey the gospel; but if left to themselves they would, at the end of that century, look around them, and say, “Who hath believed our report?” And the sorrowful answer would be, *not one*.

It must then be evident, that if we had nothing to rely upon but our own qualifications and efforts, or the dispositions of natural men, we should be in a state of utter despondency. Looking merely at ourselves, and at unrenewed sinners, we could have no resolution even to begin the work, because we could have no prospect of success. We should feel that prayer itself could have no efficacy, considered merely as an act of ours, separate from that divine aid after which it aspires.

Here we are met by the animating doctrine of our text, that the conversion of sinners is accomplished by *the power of God*,—a power supernatural, sovereign, and infinite. This is the very doctrine we need. It raises us at once above all discouragement. For now we become allied to a power which makes success cer-

tain. Yes, brethren, if we have faith in God, we shall take hold on his everlasting strength. And then, as to all the purposes of encouragement and success, it will be as though we ourselves were almighty. For it is surely as well, that the omnipotence which is to accomplish the work should reside in *God*, as in *us* ;—as well that it should be guided by *his* wisdom, as by *ours*. Now if *we* had infinite power, so that we could change the hearts of sinners just when we pleased, and could cause the gospel to spread and the church to flourish just as far as we saw to be best ; surely we could not feel any discouragement. For who ever felt any discouragement in regard to a work, for which he believed himself fully qualified, and which he knew he could accomplish whenever he pleased ? Behold, then, that infinite power which is engaged in the work of saving sinners. True, the power is *God's*. But who can think it any the less important for that, or any the less adequate to the object ? The power is indeed *God's*. But then we are to act in connexion with it ; and it will avail to our success as much as though it were ours, just so far as infinite wisdom sees to be best....At a certain time, the disciples were in a ship in a violent and perilous storm. And what power had they to preserve themselves from the destruction which threatened them ? Who of them could say to the winds and waves, *peace, be still* ? Thinking only of themselves, they had then good reason to be filled with fear. But there was one in the ship, whom the winds and the waves obeyed. He therefore rebuked them for being of a fearful heart, because it showed their want of confidence in him. With such a friend near them, they were as safe, and they had as much reason to *feel* that they were safe, as if they themselves had been almighty. So, brethren, I say, the cause of God is as safe,—the prospect of the conversion of sinners and the enlargement of the church is as certain, as it could be, if its ministers and its members were all omnipotent. Omnipotence is really engaged in the work, and we act in alliance with it ; so that our weakness, instead of hindering the success of the gospel, will only prove the occasion of making the power of God more conspicuous. Weak and insufficient as we are, we are employed as instruments in promoting this

work ; and we are employed, the Apostle says, for this very purpose, *that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

Should we forget the power of God, and look only to ourselves ; and then consider what a work is to be done for a single congregation or a single person, especially for a *world lying in wickedness* ; we should be overwhelmed with a sense of our insufficiency. But here we learn, that our insufficiency is no obstacle to the salvation of sinners ; that they are to be converted by a power which resides in God, not in us ; that, while he is pleased to appoint us as agents in this work, and even to make our faithful labors necessary to the salvation of men ; the work itself is his ; and his the power which accomplishes it. What then have we to do with discouragement ?

However disheartening the circumstances in which we may be called to labor for the salvation of men, the doctrine of the text is manifestly suited to sustain and animate us. Suppose we should be placed where but few would cooperate with us and help forward the conversion of sinners. Suppose we should be called, as some of our beloved missionaries are, to a region where the whole multitude around us were enemies to the cross of Christ, and we were obliged to labor and pray alone. Oh ! What painful despondency would these circumstances tend to produce ! But our doctrine would afford an effectual remedy. Only let our minds be duly impressed with the truth, that the power of God ensures success, and that he who is with us is greater than all who are against us ; and there would be no place left for despondency. An almighty and merciful Being, invisible indeed, but well known to us, and ever near us, would bid us go forward in our work, promising to be with us, and to give the increase, whether the laborers are many or few. In such a case, a feeling of our solitariness and weakness would only lead us to make God our all in all, and to trust in him alone ; and such trust would cheer and animate our hearts.

Or suppose, (as is the case with many a minister of Christ,) that we have labored for years and offered up many prayers for the conversion of sinners around us, but apparently with little or no success. How can we prevent the tendency of these cir-

cumstances to subdue our resolution, and paralyze our efforts? In no way, but by a proper consideration of our doctrine. The success of our labors depends ultimately on God. He giveth the increase; and he giveth it when it seemeth good in his sight. And he generally giveth it at such a time, and in such a manner, as will make his power and grace most visible. He may suffer us to labor for a longer or shorter time without success, for the very purpose of making us feel our dependence on him, so that we may give him the glory that is due to him as the God of salvation. When he has humbled us and made us sensible that we are nothing, and that he is all in all, and when “the time, even the set time to favor Zion has come,” he will give the increase. These views are suited to inspire unfailing resolution, and to rouse those, who would otherwise be discouraged, to be diligent in business, and to abound in the work of the Lord.

Again; our doctrine is adapted to excite hope in regard to those who are *the most hardened in sin*. Be it so, that they have long rebelled against divine truth, and resisted the Holy Spirit. Be it so, that we have often intreated them with tears, and often prayed for their salvation, while no effect has appeared but a growing insensibility to the obligations of religion. Are we to despair of ultimate success? No. It is indeed true, that *we* cannot reach their hearts. Our love and our intreaties cannot subdue their pride and obstinacy—cannot produce one emotion of penitential sorrow. But this is no more true in regard to *them*, than in regard to all other sinners. If any of the human race,—if even those who are the least contaminated with vice, and who possess the most attractive amiableness of disposition, are ever born again; it will be by no power of *ours*, but by the power of *God*,—power as really supernatural, as that which is required to convert the very chief of sinners. Why then should the chief of sinners be despaired of? If God is pleased to send forth his new creating Spirit into the hearts of those, whom you may be ready to look upon as lost beyond recovery; oh, what a surprising change will you soon behold! You will see them at the feet of Jesus. Our doctrine authorizes us to cherish the hope of such a blessed change in the most hardened sinners, and to anticipate

the joy we shall experience, when it actually takes place. How happy an influence must such a hope have upon our feelings and our conduct!

The doctrine of the text is obviously suited to exert a powerful and happy influence in regard to the *cause of Missions*. In obedience to the command of Christ, we are to labor perseveringly for the salvation of the heathen world. Here especially it is true, that mere human power can do nothing. Without the help of God, the whole body of Christians can make no advance towards bringing the heathen to the saving knowledge of Christ. Ten thousand obstacles stand in the way of their salvation, and will mock our highest efforts; and the certain, inevitable course of things will be, that crimes and miseries will increase among them from one generation to another, down to the end of time, unless the Lord of heaven and earth exert his omnipotence, and create all things new. Thus, in regard to the whole extent of the work to be accomplished for the conversion of the pagan world, we are driven away from all dependence on human power. Human resources utterly fail. And unless we look to the higher resources of power and wisdom and mercy in God, we can have no prospect of the world's reformation. Let us trust then in those higher resources. God can send forth such light and truth, and such an influence of his Spirit, that nations shall be born in a day, and every knee bow at the name of Jesus. All things are possible with God, and all things are *easy* too. If he only speak the word, the proudest rebels will submit, and the gospel have free course and be glorified in all the earth. Shall we then be disheartened, because *our* power is not adequate to the work of converting sinners and saving the world? Just as well might we be disheartened in regard to the daily rising of the sun and the motion of the planets, because they are things beyond our power. Consider the precious promises of God concerning the salvation of sinners. Consider the perfect ease with which he can accomplish these promises, and the certainty that he will accomplish them in his own time and way. Then consider what part he has assigned to us in this work of benevolence; that although he has reserved all power in his own hands,

he has required us, or I might rather say, has granted us the *privilege*, to make known divine truth and call sinners to repentance ; the privilege to plant and water,—at the same time assuring us that he will give the increase.

What more can we ask ? Every other motive that can come before the mind, is weak and inefficacious compared with this. Yea, without this, every other view of the subject would leave us in a state of discouragement. Our own qualifications and efforts, we have seen, fall infinitely short of the magnitude of the object, so that we can place no reliance upon ourselves. And such evidently is the character and state of sinners, that we can place no reliance upon them. In a word, brethren, there is nothing in us, or in others ; there is nothing in the natural tendencies of the human mind, nothing in the state of society, or in the influence of civil or religious institutions, nothing in the lessons of wisdom taught by the experience of ages ; there is nothing even in the exhibition which the Scriptures make of the mercies and the terrors of the Lord, which, separate from the influence of the Spirit, could furnish the least reason to expect, that any nation, or any individual would ever submit to the reign of Christ. We are then brought, and I am sure it will be agreeable to the feelings of every minister and every Christian present to be brought, *to the sovereign power and mercy of God*, as the only ground of hope, the only cause of success. Here is a power that can encourage and sustain our efforts,—a power that can renew sinners, and bring the world to obey the gospel, and can do it by means of our feeble, imperfect services.

That the doctrine of the text really possesses the influence which I have ascribed to it, has been confirmed by long experience. This doctrine has actually excited the servants of Christ, amid all sorts of difficulties and discouragements, to labor perseveringly for the conversion of sinners. Paul believed that *neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth is any thing ; that salvation is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy*. And whenever he did any thing which turned to account in the cause of his Lord, he entirely disclaimed the credit of it, saying, “ *not I*, but the grace of Christ that

was with me." But this view of his dependence on God both for his faithfulness in the ministry, and for his success, was accompanied with a resolution, diligence, and perseverance, which nothing could overcome. A deep sense of dependence on God naturally tends to produce, and always will produce this effect upon the servants of Christ. If at any time they forget their dependence and weakness ; if they lose sight of that divine agency which renews the heart, and begin to think themselves able, by forcible argument, or by persuasive eloquence, to bring sinners to repentance ; it is *then* they are likely to grow remiss. The motive which actuates them is feeble ; and its power must quickly be exhausted. But let those who are laboring to turn sinners to God, have a proper feeling of their own insufficiency ; let them have faith in God, and keep their eye steadily fixed on his power, as the only cause of success ; and they will have a diligence and zeal, which will not only rise high, but endure to the end. New hope, new ardor will be kindled up within them ; and they will abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. Thus, while all who rely on human power shall faint and be weary, they who wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength ; shall mount up with wings as eagles ; shall run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.

It is a fair inference from what has been said, that *the best preparation which can be made on our part for the work of divine grace in a revival of religion, is, to become duly sensible, that we are nothing, and that God is all in all.* I say *duly* sensible,—sensible in a *right manner*, and with *right accompanying circumstances*. The feeling I refer to is not like the inability of a sick man to rise up and walk ; nor is it like the inability of a man to move and act, when he is overcome with sleep. He who is *duly* sensible of his insufficiency, and his dependence on God, is all alive to the interests of religion. He knows that sinners, whether old or young, are utterly ruined. He knows that their end draws near, and that if they die in impenitence, their souls are lost forever. This view of their depravity and wretchedness moves the pity of his heart. He longs and pants for their salvation. His

soul is all on fire to see the glory of God displayed in the conversion of the multitudes who are ready to perish. But with all his pity, and love, and zeal, and all his fervent prayer for the salvation of those who are lost, he is convinced, he knows and feels, that not one of them will ever be converted without special divine influence; that his word will return unto him void, and all his labor accomplish nothing, unless it please God to interpose, and save sinners by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Thus, while all his faculties are wakefully employed in the work which God has assigned him, he is sensible that nothing can be done, unless God is pleased to send forth his renewing Spirit. He therefore refers it all to God's sovereign will, and fixes the eye of faith and hope on him, who *hath mercy on whom he will have mercy*.

This state of mind is highly important as a preparation for a revival of religion, because it fits us to perform, in the best manner, the particular work assigned to us. When we are in the state of mind here intended, we shall be most likely to have that spiritual illumination, which will enable us to discern clearly what our province is, and what are the particular duties which we are required to perform. We shall be inclined to assiduous, persevering labor; because in this state of mind all our faculties will be most strongly excited, and most ready for action; and because our trust in God will bring us into a close alliance with his infinite power, and so will prepare us for efforts to which our own unaided power would be wholly inadequate.

And while this state of mind prepares us to perform the very work which God has marked out for us, it will have an important influence also in preventing us from undertaking any other. If we entertain the thought that we are called to convert, and can convert men by our own independent efforts, shall we not be liable to adopt methods which are incompatible with the word of God? Is it not a fact, that those who have, in any period of the church, endeavoured to convert men by means which they have invented, and such as Christ and the Apostles never used, have, without exception, shown an undue confidence in themselves, and a want of reliance on the Spirit of God? If we are fully per-

suaded, and feel, that our success depends on the influence of the Spirit ; we can have no motive to adopt any measures for the conversion of sinners, except those which manifestly accord with the Scriptures. Our single object will be to do the will of God as expressed in his word, and so to secure his blessing upon our labors. This makes our work plain and simple. It keeps our eye fixed upon a standard of action which is perfect and immutable, and so guards us against the restlessness of those who, instead of humbly looking for success to the blessing of God upon the faithful preaching of his word, are continually looking to some new and unauthorized measures. It makes us content to copy the example of the Apostles, who used the weapons which God had furnished, and those only ; who preached *his* truth in *his* way, and relied upon him to give their preaching effect.\*

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\* It was not the design of the preacher in this part of the sermon, to pass sentence upon any of the various measures which have been adopted to promote revivals of religion, but merely to hint at the *principles* by which we should be governed in our ministerial labors, and the considerations to which we should attend, in order to satisfy ourselves as to the propriety of any particular measures which may be proposed to us. It is certainly suitable that the ministers and friends of Christ should be aware of their liability to misjudge in regard to the best way of promoting his cause, and that they should be deeply solicitous, that every measure they pursue, should be in accordance with the word of God. If we believe, as all Protestants profess to do, that the Bible is the only and sufficient rule of faith and practice ; how can we consistently neglect to govern ourselves by it ?

To guard against all mistake, and to make myself rightly understood, I shall here advert to one of the measures which have been extensively adopted of late by evangelical ministers and churches ; that is, what is called *the protracted religious meeting*. On this subject there has been a diversity of opinions among the friends of revivals. But for myself,—after much reflection, I have become satisfied of the fitness and utility of holding such a meeting occasionally, and under proper regulations, by the following reasons.

1. It was the appointment of God under the former dispensation, that religious observances should on particular occasions be continued for several days in succession. And this divine appointment undoubtedly involved a principle adapted to the nature and constitution of man. The history of Christ and the Apostles, and of the church in its best days, furnishes much evidence in favor of the same principle, and none against it.

2. The withdrawal of men, on particular occasions, from common worldly pursuits, and fixing their attention on the concerns of the soul, for a longer time than usual, has a tendency manifestly favorable to the success of the gospel.

Let me say, finally, that the preparation which I have insisted upon is of great importance, because it guards us against feelings

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3. God has put upon such meetings a visible mark of his approbation, by making them the means of the hopeful conversion of a great multitude of sinners, and of advancing believers in a holy life.

4. Evangelical Christians, both in this country and in Great Britain, have in past times frequently had religious exercises substantially like those we are now considering. At the larger meetings of ecclesiastical bodies, and to some extent at communion seasons, they have had religious services in public for several days in succession. It cannot therefore be alleged, that a meeting continued through a part of several days for the purpose of promoting the interests of religion, is an *innovation*, or that it has any thing new, except its name, and the particular order or mode of its exercises.

After this testimony in favor of such a meeting when properly conducted, I shall take the liberty, from a sincere regard to the interests of the Church, to suggest a few things by way of caution.

As a three or four days' meeting must be considered as an *extraordinary* means of grace, in distinction from those which are ordinary ; to introduce it frequently in the same place, and especially to make it *common*, would be contrary to its design, and would be likely to defeat its end.

I remark further, that while ministers and intelligent Christians, who take a leading part in such a meeting, ought most earnestly to cherish pure and ardent love to Christ and to the souls of men ; they ought also very carefully to avoid all agitating excitements, and to maintain that tranquil, solemn, devout frame of mind, which will prepare them to feel divine things most deeply themselves, and to discourse of them in the most edifying manner to others.

Finally. Although such a means, as that now under consideration, seems calculated in a remarkable degree to promote the interests of religion ; yet it is evidently liable to be perverted, and so to become a source of great evil. If it should be introduced too often, or without the requisite preparation ; if it should be made the occasion of neglecting the duties of the closet, or the duties of public or family worship ; if it should have an influence to lead men to think lightly of the pastoral office, and of a thorough preparation for the ministry, or to undervalue the institution of the sabbath, and its regular public and private services ; if those who engage in the exercises of such a meeting should exhibit forwardness, self-conceit, spiritual pride, or censoriousness ; if they should betray the want of habitual veneration for God, and show an irreverent familiarity, lightness, or vulgarity in prayer ; if they should labor to excite that commotion in the mind which unfits it for calm reflection ; if they should forget the deceitfulness of the heart and the wiles of Satan ; if, instead of exhibiting the divine law in all its spirituality and extent, as the rule of duty and the means of conviction, and holding forth the plain, humbling doctrines of God's word, and declaring all his counsel, they should dwell continually upon a few favorite topics ; if they should take but

of *pride* and *self-complacency*, and disposes us to give to God all the glory of man's salvation? Can we expect that God will work by means of our feeble efforts, when he sees that we are inclined to arrogate to ourselves the honor which belongs to him? Vanity and pride, especially in ministers, is a mighty hindrance to the work of God's grace in the conversion of sinners. When this hindrance is removed, and God sees us humble and self-abased, and yet ready to do our part faithfully, and with all our heart; then we may expect that he will revive his work. And we may expect that the work of his grace will be glorious, somewhat in proportion as we are disposed to acknowledge his hand, and to abound in prayer and praise.

Among our various efforts, then, to prepare ourselves for the blessed work of converting sinners and building up of the church, this, my brethren, would seem to be of special importance, namely, that we take care of our own hearts, and see to it that we are rid of that pride and self-dependence, which is so exceedingly hateful in the sight of God, and that we have that lowly heart, and that reliance on his grace, which he regards as of great price.

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little pains to bring to view the evidences of true conversion, and the danger of self deception; in a word, if they should break loose from the sober, scriptural principles which have been held by the best men in past ages, and which were so ably supported by Baxter, Doddridge, Edwards, Brainerd, Bellamy, and others of like character, and yield themselves up to a rash, turbulent, fanatical spirit;—I say, if those who are concerned in the protracted meeting should be chargeable with such mistakes as these, and the meeting be marked with such excesses; it would soon become an object of general contempt; the community would stigmatize it; its very name would be a reproach; and all who felt for the honor of God and the welfare of the church, would abandon it as the occasion of evils so visible, and so tremendous. It cannot be doubted that, while engaged in such exercises as are common in the protracted meeting, the human mind is liable to the errors and disorders suggested above. But notwithstanding this, it seems to me expedient, in present circumstances, for ministers and christians to go steadily forward, and make further trial of the efficacy of the special measure on which I have so freely remarked,—looking to God for direction, and endeavouring to profit by experience, and to satisfy themselves more and more, what course to pursue in order to accomplish most for the cause of Christ. Meanwhile, it is certainly incumbent on the friends of revivals to guard themselves and each other very watchfully against irregularity and excess in regard to a means of religion, which, with the divine blessing, might be productive of so much good.

And if some of the exertions we make for other and more showy acquisitions, were made for the particular purpose of subduing all conceit of our own power, and cherishing a spirit of deep humility, fervent prayer, and child-like dependence on God ; should we not be likely to accomplish more for the salvation of sinners, and the spread of the gospel? You are familiar with what the sacred historian relates respecting the conquest of the Midianites by Gideon. His army consisted of *thirty-two thousand men*. When he and all his host rose up early to attack the Midianites ; the Lord held him back, and said to him,—“the people with thee are *too many* for me to give the Midianites into their hand ;”—“they are *too many*,” he said,—and he gave this special reason—“*lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, mine own hand hath saved me.*” And after *twenty and two thousand* were dismissed, and only ten thousand remained, the Lord said, “*they are yet too many.*” And before he suffered them to encounter the Midianites, he had nine thousand and seven hundred more dismissed, only three hundred remaining. With this small number the victory was accomplished ; and thus the hand of God was made conspicuous.

Is not this principle often apparent in the divine administration? Only twelve men, and those too of very moderate qualifications in a worldly view, were employed as Apostles, to establish Christianity, and to propagate it through the nations. Is it not sometimes the case, that too much *human* agency is employed in our attempts to promote a revival of religion? Is not the real work of the divine Spirit sometimes prevented in this way?—or if not entirely prevented, greatly marred? And does not God sometimes look upon us, and say, *they are too many, and they think too much of their number and their influence, for me to pour out my Spirit and build up Zion* ;—and so, though he is graciously ready to do his great work, does he not sometimes refrain from it, lest we should vaunt ourselves, and say, or feel, that *our own hand hath done it*? Does not God very plainly teach us, both by his word and providence, that he attaches far more importance to the *character* of his ministers, than to their *number* ; and that he sets a much higher value upon the *kind* of

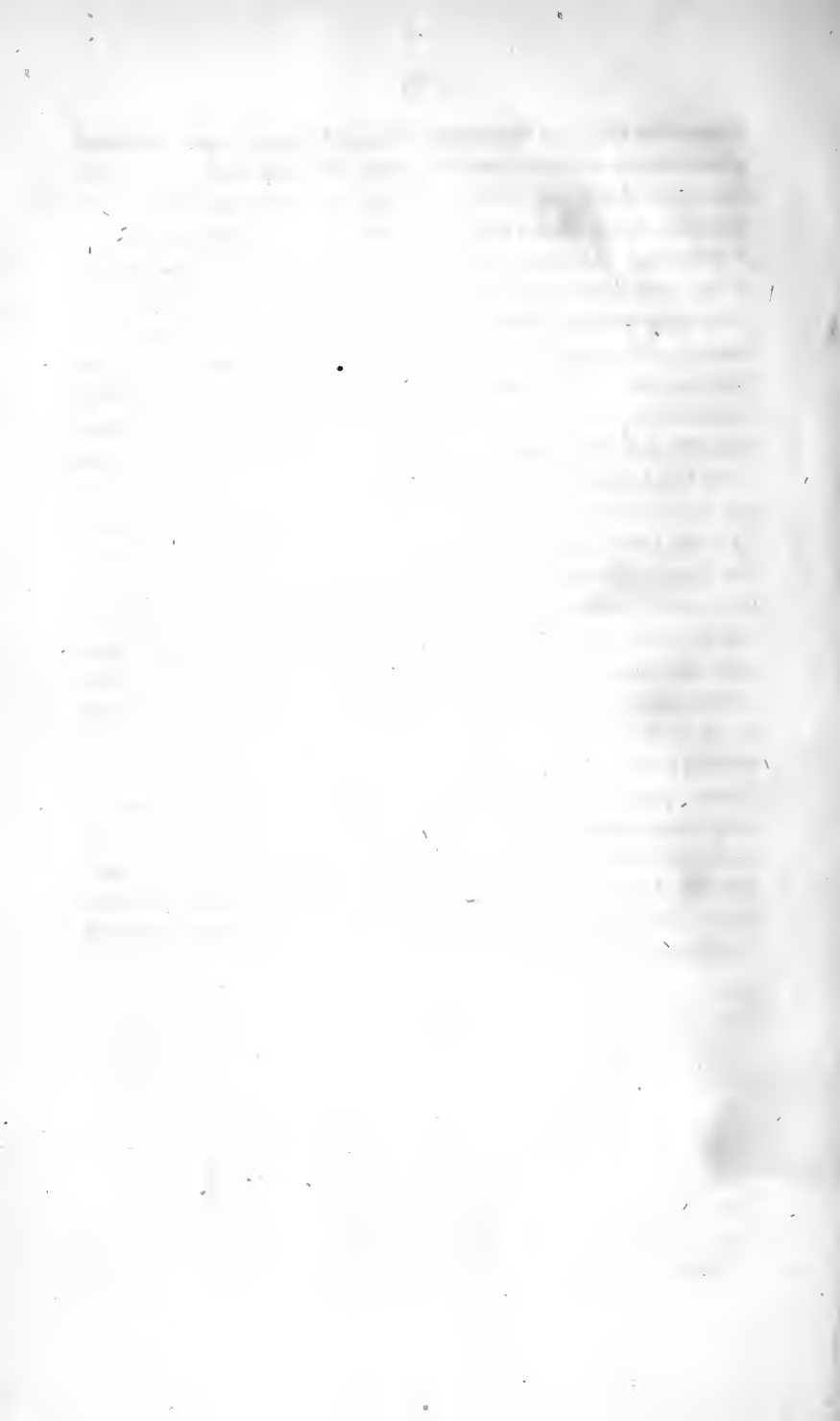
agency we employ, than upon its *quantity*? Amid our complaints then,—complaints perfectly just and well founded, of the inadequate supply of ministers; and amid our diligent efforts to increase their number, and the amount of their agency; let us not forget, that God sometimes accomplishes a work by *three hundred*, which he would not accomplish by *thirty thousand*; and that while the state of the world makes it vastly important, that the number of gospel ministers should be greatly increased; it is still more important that those who engage in the sacred office, should have better qualifications,—especially that they should have more humility and more trust in God, and that the agency they exert should be more *spiritual and holy*.

For the truth of what I have advanced in this discourse, I should love to appeal to the ministers of Christ now present, and particularly to *my respected and beloved Brother*, who has had so long and so happy a connexion with this church and society, and who now chooses to retire from his labors here for other important objects. The testimony of his experience, I doubt not, would confirm the doctrine, that the conversion of sinners and the whole success of the ministry depends on the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit; and that this divine influence affords the only adequate ground of encouragement to labor and pray for the salvation of men. He would doubtless tell us, that neither he who planteth nor he who watereth is any thing; that all is coldness, and barrenness, and death, without the quickening influence of God's Spirit. He would tell us, that the pleasing success which has both formerly and recently crowned his labors, has been attended with such circumstances, as to make it a glorious certainty in his view, that it is God, and God only, who giveth the increase, and that he giveth it when, and to what extent he pleaseth.—Is not this the truth, which has afforded a cheering light to my respected Brother in times of the greatest darkness, and inspired him with the hope of success, when his prospects in human view have been the most discouraging? The Lord grant, that he may be supported and cheered with this blessed truth in regard to the important labors in which he may still engage.

And when the closing scene arrives, and he calls to remembrance the various services which he has, through a long life, rendered to the cause of Christ, he will, I doubt not, most heartily exclaim with the Apostle, "*not I, but the grace of Christ which was with me.*"

And you, *my dear Son*, can add your testimony to the truth of the sentiment contained in my text. Your own experience, during the short period of your ministry, has been sufficient to teach you thoroughly, what the Bible had taught you before, that a minister owes his success entirely to God. While laboring among the affectionate and beloved people whom you have lately left, you have at different times enjoyed the happiness of beholding sinners pressing into the kingdom of heaven, and large numbers added to the church. And on every conversion you have witnessed, you have seen it written, as with a sun-beam,—*the work of God!* And when, in sovereign wisdom and righteousness, God has withheld the influence of his Spirit; you have found that no efforts of yours in public or in private could avail any thing; that in despite of all the terrors of divine wrath, and all the melting persuasions of divine mercy, sinners would neglect the great salvation. You have learnt by experience that men must be *born again*,—must be *born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*. There is no other way for sinners to become the heirs of heaven. There never will be any other way. For us to suppose that we can find out a new way, or that there can be a new way, is all delusion. The human heart is essentially the same in all ages; and the power which renews it is the same; and that power is not the power of motives; it is not the power of reason, nor the power of self-love, nor the power of human persuasion; but *the mighty power of God*,—the power which raised Christ from the dead; the power which caused the light to shine out of darkness; the power which created the world. The labors and prayers of his servants are important, because he sees fit to make use of them as means of salvation. But he makes use of these means, not to supersede or conceal his agency, but to manifest and exalt it.

Remember this, my dear Son, in the encouraging and delightful circumstances in which you are now called to labor. If any of the dear children and youth in this place, and others farther advanced in life, have an ear to hear the messages of divine mercy ; it is because God has given them an ear. If they have a heart to understand and love the truth ; it is because God has given them such a heart. Never forget this. It is a radical truth, essential to the glory of God, and the welfare of the church. If you overlook this,—(which may divine grace prevent ;) if while the work of conversion and sanctification is prospering, you forget that it is *God's* work, and that all spiritual blessings come from him ; and if his people in this place become unmindful of the high obligations they are under to infinite and sovereign mercy ; the Lord in righteous judgment will withhold the tokens of his favor. No rain or dew will descend from heaven ; and you will soon behold these trees, now covered with blossoms, withering and dying, and this garden of God, now beginning to cluster with the fruits of the Spirit, left to blasting and barrenness. Remember then, that salvation is of God. Look to him as the fountain of all good. Acknowledge and feel, that without him you can do nothing ; that your preaching will all be in vain, unless he is graciously present to give efficacy to the truth. In every part of your sacred work, rely entirely upon his almighty grace. And begin and end the labors of every week, and the labors of your ministry here, with a deep feeling of the blessed truth, that *neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth ; but God that giveth the increase.*











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